2: Allen G-5 (1941) 1943 MP5 Amhara MP5

the triangle of mountains bounded on the north by the Dessie–Debra Tabor road; on the west by the canyon of the Blue Nile; on the east by the Strada Imperiale; and on the south by the Debra Markos–Addis Ababa road. Here Ras Kassa's Shoan fief of Salale adjoins his territories in Amhara Saint. Salale is a great grassy upland, in May already swept by rain storms for six or eight hours a day. The road to Addis Ababa passes through Ras Kassa's capital of Fiche, which has the usual character of Abyssinian country towns: an agglomeration of huts standing in rather dreary eucalyptus groves and dominated by a fort and the European villa of the Ras. Salale has the reputation of being the best horse-raising country in Abyssinia.

Fiche has a certain strategic importance in the feudal politics of Abyssinia since it lies across the main line of communication between the capital and Gojjam; and in the period of *coup d'états* in the '20s the lord of Salale was always in the position to intervene suddenly in the capital only 70 miles away.

Ras Kassa has always maintained his loyalty to the Makonnen house. He is a magnificent old veteran of war and politics, rugged and erect in spite of his advanced years. Ras Kassa's two elder sons, who had come in to discuss a truce with the Italians some months after the fall of Addis Ababa in 1936, were executed under circumstances of abominable treachery. Nevertheless the old Ras made himself responsible for the escort of the Agibar prisoners over about 150 miles of country without a single one of them coming to any harm.

I was fortunate in June and July in spending some time in Dessie and in making my way up to the Debra Tabor district where, in mid-July, the Italian garrison of some six thousand men surrendered. Dessie, which means "my joy" in Amharic, is an ideal base from which to study the incomparably beautiful country round. The former capital of Ras Michael, the Moslem father of the ex-Emperor Lij Iyasu, Dessie became the northern military headquarters of the Empire during the years preceding the Italian conquest. Dessie was favourably situated in relation to the Italian frontier in southern Eritrea, but it owed its strategic importance to the inner political situation. To the east and north-east along the line of the Eastern Escarpment overlooking the Danakil Depression and the Red Sea basin is the country of the turbulent Wagara Gallas who were, and who remain, a recurrent threat to internal security. The Wagara clans in fact lie athwart the main south–north route from Addis Ababa to Aduwa and the new and hardly less important motor road down the Escarpment and across the Danakil desert to Assab. During the years 1929–31, each autumn after the Great Rains, the Emperor had not less than thirty thousand men in the field engaged in more or less fruitless marches and counter-marches over the highlands of the Wagara country.

Scarcely less formidable were the great conservative lords of the north: Ras Gugsa of Makale, who afterwards went over to the Italians; Ras Seyum of Tigrai, ruling all the country between the upper Takkaze and the Eritrean border; and Ras Gugsa Wolye of Debra Tabor, an ex-husband of the Empress Zawditu, who himself had pretensions to the throne and the support of the powerful centre of the Coptic priesthood in Aduwa.

The last great feudal campaign in Ethiopia took place in 1931. The Im-

3: Buxton Y-5 (1946-1948)1949 MP5 Amhara MP5

for, and, in the height of the rains when some crops are already up, deep furrows are made at regular intervals, and enlarged from time to time to carry away the surplus rain water.

Irrigation on the shelves of the gorges has already been referred to. But a more elaborate system, the extent of which is shown schematically on the map, has been developed along the river Beressa and its tributary the Maka, which both provide a small flow of water throughout the dry season. The whole enterprise is an interesting example of concerted effort and communal organization—in neither of which are the Amharas usually believed to excel. Its object is to ensure an early crop of barley, to be reaped before the onset of the main rains in June.

The irrigation system has to be partly rebuilt every dry season for the dams, which are constructed of stones and heavy sods, are swept away in the rains. From each dam the water is led off into a well-established furrow, which is carried down in a divergent line from the river and sometimes cut out of the rock on steep scarps. From it minor channels, which can be opened or blocked at will, branch off to irrigate the intervening lands. There are however more complicated systems; thus the dam near Dilila feeds two irrigation channels, one on either bank of the river. The right-bank channel receives its water direct from the dam, that on the left bank by means of an aqueduct carried across the main stream just below the dam and likewise constructed of stones and sods. The flow is not sufficient to feed both at once, so that the water is excluded from one or other branch on different days of the week; while if rain happens to fall the whole system is switched off. The left-bank channel, after running almost parallel to the Beressa for nearly a mile and a half, has to cross obstacles in the form of two tributary streams. The second tributary crossed is a large one, and the irrigation channel, in order to maintain its level, makes a big loop upstream and is then carried over the tributary by means of another wall-like aqueduct 8 or 10 feet high.

During the latter part of the dry season the brilliant green crops of the irrigated area make a striking contrast to the brown and withered aspect of the surrounding countryside. The district (known as Atakilt or "garden") takes its name from this characteristic feature. There are other minor irrigation schemes on the plateau, as on the Dalecha river in the east and the Angolala river in the west of the sheet, but nothing on so large a scale or so elaborately organized as the Beressa system. The Atakilt plains also have historic interest as the scene of the battle, already mentioned, which resulted in the emperor Theodore's annexation of Shoa and the capture of young Menelik.

To conclude this brief account of the agricultural techniques of our area something must be said of terracing and its effect on the landscape. Nothing like the impressive and elaborate terracing practised in some eastern rice-growing countries is attempted in these parts. Many slopes are nevertheless unobtrustively terraced, both in the gorges and on the plateau, and it is not uncommon to see new terraces in process of formation. A wall (*gur*) is built on the lower side of the area selected for improvement, advantage being often taken of any natural flattening of the hillside. The *gur* has a vertical face on

11:Levine Z-4,5 (1958-1961)1965 MP5 Amhara MP5

173 175 deal with this matter present different pictures, however. Blättengētā Heruy and Guèbrè Sellassié telescope the genealogy: Yā'qob—Segew Qāl—Nagāssi. Tādassa Za-Waldē, on the other hand, leaves the question open; he identifies Segew Qāl as one of Yā'qob's sons, and refers to Nagāssi as father of the Shoan Dynasty, but affirms nothing concerning a connection between Segew Qāl and Nagāssi.

The picture is further complicated by the fact that none of these versions was reported to European travelers in the nineteenth century prior to the ascendance of Menelik. According to information given Major Harris by Shoan informants in the 1840's, Nagāssi inherited royal blood through his mother, who was said to be a granddaughter of "a daughter of the House of Solomon." Four decades later Soleillet was told still another story, namely, that "the kings of Shoa are now of the House of David, heirs of Solomon, cousins of Christ" not through Nagāssi, but by virtue of the marriage of his great-great-grandson, Asfā Wassan, to a relative of the imperial family at Gondar. Cecchi, finally, mentions none of these legitimizing affiliations.

113 25. Heruy manuscript, p. 19.

26. The latter version is given by Cecchi.

27. James Bruce, *Travels to Discover the Source of the Nile* (5 vols.; London, 1790), III, 255–56.

28. Cecchi, *op. cit.*, I, 241.

29. Takla Ṭsādeq, *op. cit.*, p. 255.

30. Harris, *op. cit.*, III, 9.

31. Takla Ṭsādeq, *op. cit.*, p. 257.

32. Harris, *op. cit.*, III, 12.

33. Isenberg and Krapf, *op. cit.*, p. 301. Heruy's account of the rebellion of [114] Matako is considerably different. We are following Harris and Krapf here since they were virtually contemporaneous with the events, and would have no particular reason not to record them faithfully.

34. Isenberg and Krapf, *op. cit.*, p. 302.

35. Harris, *op. cit.*, II, 133.

36. Arnauld d'Abbadie, *Douze ans de séjour dans la Haute-Éthiopie* (Paris, 1868), p. 173.

[103] 37. The word "Manz" (or "Manzeh"), according to local clergy, stems from a Ge'ez expression which means "land on which Christ's blood was sprinkled."

38. Ludolphus, *op. cit.*, p. 215.

39. The architecture and layout of the imperial compound are described in Monti della Corte, *I castelli di Gondar* (Rome: Società Italiana Arti Grafiche, 1938).

40. On the role of the *abuna*, cf. below, chap. v.

41. C. Poncet, "A Voyage to Ethiopia," *The Red Sea and Adjacent Countries at the Close of the Seventeenth Century* (London: Hakluyt Society, 1949), p. 61.

42. This is what has been called an orthogenetic, as distinguished from a heterogenetic, pattern of cultural development. Cf. Robert Redfield and Milton Singer, "The Cultural Role of Cities," *Economic Development and Cultural Change*, III, No. 1, 53–73.